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ABSTRACT

Data were collected on student attitudes toward academic advising as part of a larger survey of students at George Mason University (Virginia). Both the academic advising and continuing education (Extended Studies) counseling programs were assessed. Over half of those using Extended Studies counseling and a third of those using academic advising rated them good to excellent. In both cases, older students tended to rate more favorably. Availability of advisors, perceptions of advisor role and assistance are also examined. Since academic advising received considerable negative comments, an analysis of the total advising system is recommended as a result of the survey. Checks for consistency in policy across schools within the university are also recommended. Other areas for analysis include advisors' perceptions of their own roles, and program provisions to accommodate changing student needs and characteristics. (MSE)

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# AN EVALUATION OF AN ACADEMIC ADVISING SYSTEM FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF STUDENTS

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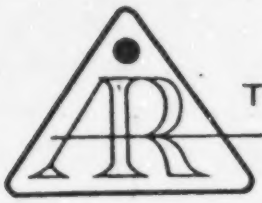

THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twentieth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Peachtree Plaza Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia, April 27 - May 1, 1980. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum papers.

Mary Corcoran
University of Minnesota
(Editor, AIR Forum Publications)

Introduction

Even the most superficial review of the literature on the state of the art in higher education points to an overwhelming concern with academic advising systems (See for example, Astin, 1976; Chickering, 1973; Levine and Weingarten, 1973). A closer look reveals inconsistent recommendations as to who should advise or what method they should use. More important than a definitive answer to the above questions would be for institutions to assess the status of their current advising system. Mash (1978:36) suggests,

> "It is imperative that advising systems be developed which will bring to a halt the pathetic 'student shuffle' from office to office and usually back to peers for 'inside' information and coping mechanisms."

The data and discussion which follow are part of a larger study on the use and assessment of various services and activities by students at George Mason University (Hickey, 1979). While the survey was exploratory in nature, an assessment of the academic advising system was an integral part of the questionnaire and was a major focus for analysis. The format for the questions on academic advising resulted from discussions with various sectors of the university community. The questions reflected the concerns of those who are responsible for the policies regarding academic advising and the students' concerns as far as their expectations for advising and the assistance they actually received.

The Study

The heterogeneity of the student population at George Mason University was taken into account in the choice of a stratified random sample survey design. The strata chosen for the survey were a combination of the age of the student and the number of credit hours attempted (Fall 1978). A mail questionnaire was chosen as the method for conducting the survey research. Using an approximation of the "total design method" advocated by Dillman (1978), the initial mailout was in late April 1979 with a post card reminder ten days later and a second questionnaire to nonrespondents one month after the initial mailout. The response rate for the total sample was 70.8% (N=352). The response for each strata was within $\pm$ 10% of the overall response rate. The external validity of the sample was checked and no significant differences were found comparing the sample and population distributions for sex, marital status, race and citizenship.

Note:

The discussion which follows refers to both Extended Studies Counseling and Academic Advising. These terms were used to distinguish between the Division of Continuing Education (Counseling) and all other students admitted into a regular degree program (Advising).

Academic Advising

In discussing the findings regarding academic advising reference will be made to the use and rating of both Extended Studies Counseling and Academic Advising (from Question 1), as well as responses to Questions 3 and 4 dealing with the number of times students met with their advisor/counselor during the Fall '78 semester and student expectations for various levels of advising assistance.

Over half of those who report using Extended Studies Counseling rate it good-excellent. One third of those who use academic advising rate it good-excellent. In both cases, the older students tend to rate it more favorably. Unavailability of advising evenings and weekends was reported by part-time students, ages 25-34 more often than other strata; the percent in this category who do not use Extended Studies Counseling due to unavailability is 5.7 and the figure for Academic Advising is 7.9%. For marginals within strata, see Appendix 1, Tables 1 and 2.

Percentage Use of Extended Studies Counseling and Academic Advising

| | % Use Extended Studies Counseling | % Use Academic Advising |
|---|---|---|
| Do not use: | | |
| Choose not to use | 60.1 | 25.3 |
| Not available evenings/ weekends | 2.3 | 2.6 |
| Don't know if available | 14.5 | 4.6 |
| Use: would rate it | | |
| Poor-Fair | 10.7 | 44.9 |
| Good-Excellent | 12.4 | 22.7 |

The breakdown by strata for Question 3 shows that for the total sample, 62.1% met with their advisor at least once during the Fall '78 semester. Within strata, those students who were full-time, age 22 and over were most likely to have met at least once (71.7%). Those part-time students, ages 25-34 were least likely to report meeting with their advisor (59.0%). The percentages by stratifier for Question 3 are reported in Appendix 1, Table 3.

Percent Reporting Met With Academic Advisor-
Extended Studies Counselor Fall '78 Semester

| | |
|---|---|
| Didn't meet | 33.8 |
| Met once | 36.6 |
| Met 2+ times | 25.5 |
| No answer = 14 | 3.9 |

The purpose of Question 4 was to determine how the student perceives the role of his/her academic advisor. To determine this, the students were asked to indicate which of the various forms of assistance they expected from their advisor and which of these they actually received. Nonresponse to a particular item would indicate that the student does not expect this assistance from the advisor (with a small allowance for those who might have chosen to ignore the question totally).

Percent Expecting But Not Receiving
Following Assistance From Academic Advisor

| | | No Answer |
|---|---|---|
| Sign course approval form | 14.1 | 15.3 |
| Explain requirements for graduation | 56.9 | 18.2 |
| Consult on course selection | 45.1 | 15.6 |
| Offer general advice | 56.8 | 21.0 |
| Refer to support services | 90.4 | 49.4 |
| Discuss graduate school studies | 78.8 | 40.9 |
| Discuss job opportunities in your field | 84.8 | 40.3 |

Since the intent of Question 4 was to ascertain the degree to which student expectations were not being met by advisors, the following discussion will center on the percent of students expecting, but not receiving, various types of assistance. Figures for item 1 (sign course approval form) show that only 14.1% of the sample expect this but do not receive it. The strata having the most difficulty getting a signature on their course approval form are those part-time students less than 25 years of age (18.4% expect but do not receive). Item 2 (explain requirements for graduation) has 56.9% of the sample expecting but not receiving an explanation of graduation requirements. The part-time and younger students have the greatest difficulty obtaining this assistance (70.3% expect but do not receive within the part-time, under 25 years of age strata). In item 3, 45.1% of the sample expect but do not receive consultation

from their advisor regarding course selection. This is particularly true for those part-time students aged 25-34 (54.7% do not receive assistance with course selection). In item 4 (offer general advice), 56.8% of the sample would like their advisor to provide this aid but do not receive it. Again, the part-time students ages 25-34 are least likely to receive general advice (68.2% expect but do not receive). Nearly one-half of the sample (49.4%) did not answer item 5 which indicates that many students do not feel their advisor should refer them to support services (e.g. tutorial, financial aid, counseling, etc.). However of those who did expect this of their advisor, very few actually received it. For example, none of the full-time students aged 22 and over who expected this assistance received it. The students who comprise the 40.9% who did not respond to item 6 apparently do not expect their advisor to discuss graduate school studies. For those in the sample who desire this assistance, 78.8% do not receive it. Within the strata, the full-time younger student is least likely to have an advisor who has discussed graduate school studies with them (86.8% expect, but do not receive). The final item (discuss job opportunities) shows 40.3% of the sample did not respond and presumably do not expect this of their advisor. Students in the sample who do expect this, report that 84.8% do not receive it. The strata least likely to

have these expectations fulfilled is the part-time student, under 25 years of age (93.1% of those who expect, do not receive). The next section will include a report of cross-tabulations looking at the questions on advising by other variables which were hypothesized to have an effect on advising.

It was felt that different responses to Question 12 (What is the highest academic degree that you intend to obtain?) might determine how students perceive the role of academic advising in their educational experience. The marginals for Question 12 show nearly 70.0% of the sample plan to obtain at least a Master's degree. Crosstabulations were computed using the responses to Question 12 categorized in two groups:

1) Plan to obtain no degree, Assoc. degree, Bachelor's
2) Plan to obtain Master's degree, or higher graduate degree

Percent Reporting Highest Academic Degree Intend to Obtain

| | |
|---|---|
| None, Assoc., Bachelors Degree | 30.8 |
| Graduate Degree | 69.2 |

Distributions for student use of Extended Studies Counseling/Academic Advising do not show significant differences when compared with their intention to pursue a graduate

degree. This pattern continues when you look at Question 3 and degree aspirations. Looking at degree plans with each item in Question 4, no significant relationships (differences) appear except for item 6.

Student Expectations for Assistance from Advisor
(Discuss Graduate School Studies)
by Highest Degree Intend to Obtain

| | Bachelors | Graduate Degree |
|---|---|---|
| Expect, do not receive | 88.9 | 75.2 |
| Expect and receive | 11.1 | 24.8 |
| Number of cases | 54 | 149 |

Chi Square = 3.69 1 degree of freedom $p = < .10$

The figures in this table show that of those students who expect their advisor to discuss graduate school studies, those intending to pursue a graduate degree are more likely to receive this from their advisor.

The next variable crosstabulated with Extended Studies Counseling/Academic Advising was the reported class level of the student. Significant differences do not appear when use of counseling/advising and the number of times the student met with his academic advisor Fall '78 are compared with the students' class level. However, there is a significant difference when the percent rating counseling/advising good-

excellent is crosstabulated with class level.

User's Rating of Academic Advising/Counseling
by Class Level

| | Poor-Fair | Good-Excellent | # of Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| Extended Studies | 41.4 | 58.6 | 29 |
| Freshman | 62.8 | 37.2 | 43 |
| Sophomore | 78.7 | 21.3 | 47 |
| Junior | 69.8 | 30.2 | 43 |
| Senior | 66.7 | 33.3 | 45 |
| Graduate | 68.6 | 31.4 | 35 |

Chi Square = 11.83  5 degrees of freedom  $p = < .05$

Extended Studies counselors receive the best rating from users (58.6% good-excellent) with Sophomores giving their advisors the worst rating (21.3% rated good-excellent). One of the items in Question 4 shows significant differences by class level. The significant Chi Square for item 2 shows that Seniors and Graduate students are most likely to receive an explanation of the requirements for graduation when they expect it (62.1 and 51.3%) and Freshmen are least likely to receive this information (26.9%).

Student Expectations for Assistance from Advisor
(Receive Explanation of Requirements for Graduation)
by Class Level

| | Expect, Do Not Receive | Expect and Receive | # of Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| Extended Studies | 60.9 | 39.1 | 14 |
| Freshman | 73.1 | 26.9 | 32 |
| Sophomore | 69.1 | 30.9 | 41 |
| Junior | 57.7 | 42.3 | 43 |
| Senior | 37.9 | 62.1 | 34 |
| Graduate | 48.7 | 51.3 | 36 |

Chi Square = 18.63  5 degrees of freedom  $p = < .01$

The final variable crosstabulated with questions on academic advising was school (division). There is a significant difference between the schools in terms of the percent who use (have used) advising/counseling. The following table shows that undergraduates in the College of Professional Studies and Extended Studies students are most likely to report they have used an advisor/counselor. Students in the School of Business Administration are least likely to use an advisor.

Use of Academic Advising/Counseling
by School

| | Do Not Use | Use | # of Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arts and Sciences | 24.2 | 75.8 | 128 |
| Professional Studies | 16.7 | 83.3 | 42 |
| Business Administration | 37.1 | 62.9 | 70 |
| Extended Studies (Division of Continuing Education) | 18.8 | 81.2 | 16 |
| Graduate | 34.9 | 65.1 | 86 |

Chi Square = 13.79  4 degrees of freedom  $p = < .01$

There was not a significant difference by school for the user's rating of their advisor/counselor. The crosstabulation of Question 3 was significant, yielding the same pattern as the use reported in Question 1. Students in the Professional School and Extended Studies were most likely to have met with their advisor/counselor at least once during the Fall '78 semester. Again, Business Administration students were the least likely to have met with their advisor.

The items in Question 4 crosstabulated by school offer further insights into the degree to which student expectations for advising are being met. The first two items do not yield a significant difference crosstabulated by school. In each case, however, undergraduates in the Professional School are most likely to receive the assistance expected.

Item 3 does show a significant difference by school in assisting students with their course selection.

Student Expectations for Assistance from Advisor
(Consult on Course Selection)
by School

| | Expect, Do Not Receive | Expect and Receive | # of Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arts and Sciences | 45.6 | 54.4 | 114 |
| Professional Studies | 28.6 | 71.4 | 42 |
| Business Administration | 59.6 | 40.4 | 57 |
| Extended Studies (Div. of Continuing Educ.) | 50.0 | 50.0 | 12 |
| Graduate | 39.1 | 60.9 | 64 |

Chi Square = 10.57 4 degrees of freedom $p = < .05$

Item 4 (offer general advice) also shows a significant difference by school.

Student Expectations for Assistance from Advisor
(Offer General Advice)
by School

| | Expect, Do Not Receive | Expect and Receive | # of Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arts and Sciences | 55.7 | 44.3 | 106 |
| Professional Studies | 42.5 | 57.5 | 40 |
| Business Administration | 76.8 | 23.2 | 56 |
| Extended Studies | 41.7 | 58.3 | 12 |
| Graduate | 54.5 | 45.5 | 55 |

Chi Square = 13.75 4 degrees of freedom $p = < .01$

Extended Studies students (Division of Continuing Education) are most likely to receive general advice from their counselors (58.3%) and undergraduate Business Administration students are least likely to receive this assistance (23.2%).

The crosstabulations of Items 5, 6 and 7 by school were not computed. The large number of persons not responding to these items would make claims of significant differences tenuous. The percentages for undergraduate responses to the item on graduate school studies are presented for the purpose of comparison with those students planning to obtain at least a Master's degree.

| | Discuss Graduate Studies | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| School | Expect, Do Not Receive | Expect and Receive | Plan to Obtain Grad. Degree |
| Arts and Sciences | 87.2 | 12.8 | 69.3 |
| Professional Studies | 83.3 | 16.7 | 57.1 |
| Business Administration | 97.4 | 2.6 | 53.7 |
| Extended Studies (Div. of Continuing Educ.) | 80.0 | 20.0 | 37.5 |

An overview of the analysis on academic advising indicates that nearly two-thirds of the sample met with their advisor during the Fall '78 semester. However, over half of the students who expect assistance from their advisor report

that their expectations are not being met in the following areas:

Explain requirements for graduation

Offer general advice

Refer to support services

Discuss graduate school studies

Discuss job opportunities in your field.

Crosstabulations reveal that only one-fourth of those students intending to pursue a graduate degree report that their advisor has discussed graduate school studies with them. Crosstabulations by class level show that: 1) Extended Studies students rate their counselor's highest; Sophomores rate their advisor's lowest. 2) Seniors are most likely to receive an explanation of the requirements for graduation; Freshmen are least likely.

When questions on academic advising were crosstabulated with school (division) many significant differences were discovered. Students in the College of Professional Studies are most likely to report they have used an advisor. Business Administration students are least likely. Significant differences were reported by students in the various schools on the types of assistance they received from their advisor. In general, the School of Professional Studies and the Division of Continuing Education are meeting the expectations of their students. The students in the School of Business Administration are least likely to report their expectations are being met by their advisor.

Suggestions for Further Research

Since academic advising received more volunteered written and and negative comments than any other area in the survey of student opinions, an analysis of the total advising system was recommended. It was felt that this analysis should include a clarification of the administration's expectations for students and faculty members and an assessment of the extent to which current academic policies reflect these expectations. In addition, checks for consistency in policies across schools,divisions,and departments were recommended. Other areas for further research included an analysis of faculty members' perception of their role as advisor and the definition of needed provisions in advising to accommodate the diversity and rapid growth of the student body at George Mason University.

A Note on Institutional Response

The University's response to the data regarding academic advising was both swift and encouraging. A central office for advising will be instituted this summer. The staff will include a full-time director, faculty and graduate assistants. Provision for enlargement of the staff has been included. The stated purpose of the newly created central office for advising will be to complement (not replace) on-going advising at the departmental level.

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# Appendix I

## Tables

Table 1

Percentage Use of Extended Studies Counseling by Strata

| | FT ≤ 22 | FT 22 + | PT ≤ 25 | PT 25-34 | PT 35 + |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Do Not Use: | | | | | |
| Choose Not to Use | 70.6 | 61.2 | 56.8 | 55.7 | 48.2 |
| Not Available Evenings/ Weekends | 2.8 | .0 | .0 | 5.7 | .0 |
| Don't Know if Available | 21.1 | 8.2 | 22.7 | 6.8 | 12.5 |
| Use: Would Rate It | | | | | |
| Poor-Fair | 3.7 | 14.3 | 10.0 | 19.4 | 8.9 |
| Good-Excellent | 1.8 | 16.3 | 11.4 | 12.5 | 30.3 |
| Nonresponse = | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |

Table 2

Percentage Use of Academic Advising
by Strata

| | FT ≤ 22 | FT 22 + | PT ≤ 25 | PT 25-34 | PT 35 + |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Do Not Use: | | | | | |
| Choose Not to Use | 21.6 | 20.8 | 28.9 | 25.8 | 32.7 |
| Not Available Evenings/ Weekends | .9 | .0 | 2.2 | 7.9 | .0 |
| Don't Know if Available | 5.4 | 4.2 | .0 | 3.4 | 9.1 |
| Use: Would Rate It | | | | | |
| Poor-Fair | 51.3 | 45.8 | 44.4 | 46.0 | 29.1 |
| Good-Excellent | 20.7 | 29.2 | 24.4 | 16.9 | 29.1 |
| Nonresponse = | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |

Table 3

Percent Reporting Met with Academic Advisor

Fall '78 Semester

| | FT ≤ 22 | FT 22 + | PT ≤ 25 | PT 25-34 | PT 35 + |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Didn't Meet | 31.8 | 28.3 | 38.6 | 41.0 | 36.3 |
| Met Once | 32.7 | 41.3 | 34.1 | 38.6 | 49.1 |
| Met 2+ Times | 35.6 | 30.4 | 27.3 | 20.5 | 14.5 |

Nonresponse = 14 (3.9%)

Table 4

Percent Expecting But Not Receiving Following Service From Advisor

| | FT ≤ 22 | FT 22 + | PT ≤ 25 | PT 25-34 | PT 35 + | Non-Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sign Course Approval Form | 10.2 | 15.0 | 18.4 | 17.1 | 13.0 | 15.3 |
| Explain Requirements for Graduation | 61.8 | 29.5 | 70.3 | 64.8 | 47.1 | 18.2 |
| Consult on Course Selection | 46.0 | 39.5 | 44.7 | 54.7 | 31.7 | 15.6 |
| Offer General Advice | 54.7 | 48.8 | 59.5 | 68.2 | 48.7 | 21.0 |
| Refer to Support Services | 92.5 | 100.0 | 96.3 | 83.0 | 82.4 | 49.4 |
| Discuss Graduate School Studies | 86.8 | 74.1 | 81.3 | 78.2 | 61.5 | 40.9 |
| Discuss Job Opportunities in Your Field | 80.2 | 80.0 | 93.1 | 90.0 | 85.0 | 40.3 |